

Gitxsan language

The **Gitxsan language** /'gɪtsæn/[3] or *Gitxsanimaax* (also rendered *Gitksan*, *Giatikshan*, *Gityskyan*, *Giklsan*), is an endangered Tsimshianic language of northwestern British Columbia, closely related to the neighboring Nisga'a language. The two groups are, however, politically separate and prefer to refer to Gitxsan and Nisga'a as distinct languages. According to the 2016 census there were 1,020 native speakers.^[1]

Gitxsan means "People of the Skeena River" ("Ksan" being the name of the Skeena in Gitxsan).

Gitxsan	
	Gitxsanimaax, Gitxsanimx
Native to	Canada
Region	Skeena region, British Columbia
Ethnicity	5,680 Gitxsan
Native speakers	1,020 (2016 census) ^[1]
Language family	Tsimshianic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nass–Gitksan ▪ Gitxsan
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	git
Glottolog	gitx1241 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/gitx1241) ^[2]

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Dialects

Gitxsan language is primarily separated into Eastern and Western Gitxsan, although each village has its own dialect. The Eastern villages include Kispiox (Ansbayaxw), Glen Vowell (Sigit'ox), and Hazelton (Git-an'maaxs). The Western villages include Kitwanga (Gjtwjngax), Gitanyow (Git-antaaw) and Kitseguecla (Gijigiyukwhla). The main differences between dialects include a lexical shift in vowels and stop lenition use present only in the Eastern dialects. The largest differences in language and culture exist between Eastern and Western Gitxsan, rather than between each village.^[4]

History and Usage

Revitalization Efforts

The University of Northern British Columbia and Siiwiixo'osxwim Wilnataahl Gitksan Society (Gitksan Language Society) set up a Developmental Standard Term Certificate program offered through Northwest Community College, with all courses offered in Hazelton, BC. The program is designed to help revitalize Gitxsan language by allowing those who complete it to teach language and culture courses at the elementary and secondary school level in the community.^[5]

In the spring of 2018, an online dictionary app was released in collaboration with members of Gitksan Nation and researchers at the University of British Columbia. The app includes various dialects of Gitxsan, and includes audio from different villages. Flashcards, stories, and histories are also included in addition to functioning as a dictionary. This app is based on a print dictionary produced in 1973 by Lonnie Hindle and Bruce Rigsby. With its launch, the app briefly held a top spot in Google Play's education category and accumulated around 500 downloads in its first week.^[6]

Phonology

The Gitxsan inventory is as follows:^[7]

Gitxsan vowels

i i:		u u:
(e) e:	(ə)	(o) o:
	a a:	

The mid and high vowels are nearly in complementary distribution, suggesting that Gitxsan once had a three-vowel system. Short mid vowels are emerging. Schwa may not be phonemic.

Gitxsan consonants

Obstruents	p	t	ts		c ^[8]	k ^w	q	
	p'	t'	ts'	tɬ'	c'	k ^w '	q'	
			s	ɬ	ç	x ^w	X	
Sonorants	m	n		l	j	w		h
	m [?]	n [?]		l [?]	j [?]	w [?]		?

The palatal obstruents become velar before /s/ and /l/.

References

1. "Language Highlight Tables, 2016 Census - Aboriginal mother tongue, Aboriginal language spoken most often at home and Other Aboriginal language(s) spoken regularly at home for the population excluding institutional residents of Canada, provinces and territories, 2016 Census – 100% Data" (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hlt-fst/lang/Table.cfm?Lang=E&T=41&Geo=01>). www12.statcan.gc.ca. Government of Canada, Statistics. Retrieved 2017-11-23.
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Gitxsan" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/gitx1241>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. "Archived copy" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20140123044647/http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100022848/1100100022849>). Archived from the original (<http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100022848/1100100022849>) on 2014-01-23. Retrieved 2014-01-07.
4. Brown, Jason; Davis, Henry; Schwan, Michael; Sennott, Barbara (December 2016). "Gitksan". *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*. 46 (3): 367–378.
5. "Gitksan Students Complete Coursework" (<https://www.unbc.ca/releases/2005/08-10gitksan>). August 10, 2005. Retrieved December 14, 2019.

6. Muir, Cassidy (May 22, 2019). "Gitksan Dictionary Goes Mobile" (<https://www.interior-news.com/news/gitksan-dictionary-goes-mobile/>). *The Interior News*. Retrieved November 12, 2019.
7. Bruce Rigsby & John Ingram (1990) "Obstruent Voicing and Glottalic Obstruents in Gitksan". *International Journal of American Linguistics*, vol. 56, no. 2, pp. 251–263.
8. The palatals are written ⟨k⟩, ⟨x⟩, ⟨y⟩ in orthography, and transcribed ⟨k^y⟩, ⟨x^y⟩, ⟨y⟩ in Americanist notation.

Further reading

- Bicevskis, Katie; Davis, Henry; Matthewson, Lisa (2017). "Quantification in Gitksan". In Paperno, Denis; Keenan, Edward L. (eds.). *Handbook of Quantifiers in Natural Language. II*. Springer. pp. 281–382. doi:[10.1007/978-3-319-44330-0_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-44330-0_6) (https://doi.org/10.1007%2F978-3-319-44330-0_6).
- Brown, Jason; Davis, Henry; Schwan, Michael; Sennott, Barbara (2016). "Gitksan" (<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025100315000432>). Illustrations of the IPA. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*. **46** (3): 367–378. doi:[10.1017/S0025100315000432](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025100315000432) (<https://doi.org/10.1017%2FS0025100315000432>).
- Halpin, Marjorie, and Margaret Seguin (1990) "Tsimshian Peoples: Southern Tsimshian, Coast Tsimshian, Nishga, and Gitksan." In *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 7: Northwest Coast*, ed. by Wayne Suttles, pp. 267–284. Washington: Smithsonian Institution).
- Hindle, Lonnie and Bruce Rigsby (1973) *A Short Practical Dictionary of the Gitksan language*, Northwest Anthropological Research Notes 1:1-60.
- Matthewson, Lisa (2013). "Gitksan Modals". *International Journal of American Linguistics*. **79** (3): 349–394. doi:[10.1086/670751](https://doi.org/10.1086/670751) (<https://doi.org/10.1086%2F670751>).

External links

- [Official website of the Gitxsan People](http://www.gitxsan.com) (<http://www.gitxsan.com>)
- [First Voices Gitsenimx community language portal](http://www.firstvoices.ca/scripts/WebObjects.exe/FirstVoices.woa/wa/enterLanguageArchive?archive=02d830a123efe761) (<http://www.firstvoices.ca/scripts/WebObjects.exe/FirstVoices.woa/wa/enterLanguageArchive?archive=02d830a123efe761>)
- [First Nations Languages of British Columbia Gitksan page, with link to bibliography](http://www.ydli.org/langs/gitksan.htm) (<http://www.ydli.org/langs/gitksan.htm>)
- [A Selection of Prayers Translated from the Book of Common Prayer in the Giatikshan Language for Use at the Public Services](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Canada/gitxsan.htm) (<http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Canada/gitxsan.htm>) 1881 translation by Anglican missionary [William Ridley](#)
- [OLAC resources in and about the Gitxsan language](http://www.language-archives.org/language/git) (<http://www.language-archives.org/language/git>)
- [ELAR archive of Gitskan](http://elar.soas.ac.uk/deposit/0237) (<http://elar.soas.ac.uk/deposit/0237>)

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